THE Reconstructionist

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REALITIES AND VALUES *CORRESPONDENCE*

edicated to the advancement of Judaism as a religious civilization, to the upbuilding of rael's ancient homeland, and to the furtherance of universal freedom, justice and peace.

the Reconstructionist

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DITORIALS

EFLECTIONS ON THE ONIST CONGRESS

THE Zionist Congress is over and reflections upon are in order. But it is too early to evalue its work. Only future events can ow whether its decisions were wise or t. The Congress reiterated the prinples of the Biltmore Platform calling r an independent Jewish commonealth and rejected Zionist participation, nder existing circumstances," in the nference called by Great Britain. Prely what changes in circumstances uld be acceptable as enabling the nists to participate in the Conference re not specified. It was felt that the xt move would have to come from reat Britain and the decision was left the new Executive of the movement determine.

Though the Congress thus left undled many of the major issues which re debated at its sessions, it nevertheis reached a decision of great historic nment, for it marked a radical change Zionist policy. Hitherto Zionist diplomacy assumed a fundamental community interest between Great Britain and the wish people. The Balfour Declaration d the Mandate were conceived as expressing Great Britain's ultimate purpose with reference to Palestine, and, although many acts of successive British governments belied that purpose, Zionism retained a pro-British orientation and placed confidence in the ultimate good faith of the British people and its government.

But the repeated betrayal of the Jewish cause by successive governments, particularly since the issuance of the 1939 White Paper, have had their effect. The cruel and unjust suppression of Jewish migration to Palestine, the dictatorial edicts of the Palestinian authorities, the arbitrary raids and arrests, the vicious innuendoes against the Jews by high-ranking government officials in the press and public speeches have finally convinced the Zionist Organization that the British government has no intention to fulfil its obligations to the Jewish people under the Mandate. Instead, Great Britain seems determined to fustrate the establishment of the Jewish national home because that would interfere with its plans to create a strong pan-Arab movement as a political and economic ally in its struggle to maintain its empire.

Instead of relying on British good faith, Zionists are now placing their reliance on pressure from the United States and on a resistance movement in Eretz Yisrael. They hope thereby to convince the Brit-

ish public of the infeasibility of any effort to liquidate the Yishuv or to prevent continued Jewish immigration. However, in connection with the determination to resist British encroachment on Jewish rights, it must be noted parenthetically that the Congress definitely repudiated the terrorist methods of the Irgun and the Sternists.

The radical change in Zionist policy adopted by the Congress will doubtless be dubbed extremist by non-Zionists. There is, however, nothing extreme or immoderate in the demands of the Congress. It has not shut the door to further negotiation with Great Britain. Indeed, a majority of the Executive would favor participation in the forthcoming Conference, if Great Britain were to give evidence of a desire to fulfil her obligations under the Mandate to the best of her ability. But the Zionists will not be placated by vague assurances or consider plans which, like the Morrison-Grady proposal, would nullify the whole intent of the Balfour Declaration on which the Mandate is based. They demand a genuine token of good faith on Great Britain's part in deeds and not only in words.

An unhappy consequence of the change in the political orientation of the Zionist movement is the forced retirement of Chaim Weizmann from its leadership. It is obvious that, if the movement hereafter is to put more reliance on pressure from America than on direct negotiation with British statesmen, the retention of Weizmann's leadership would hardly be consonant with that purpose. In the first place, he is a British subject, and any effort on his part to get a foreign power to exert pressure on his own country would be resented. Moreover, the cordial relations which his diplomatic efforts had built up between him and leading British statesmen would embarrass him in pursuing a policy that must to them seem unfriendly. His very political successes and achievements in the past would thus, under the changed conditions, militate against his successful prosecution of the new Zionist policy.

But this need not and will not efface the record of those achievemnts. The debt of gratitude which world Jewry owes him for the veritable marvels that were accomplished during the thirty-odd years of his leadership remains undiminished. His place in Jewish history and in the love and admiration of his people remains secure. If we have a Balfour Declaration for the fulfilment of which we count on American support, if the achievements of the Yishuv in colonization have impressed Americans with the advantage to civilization of a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine, if we have a Hebrew University that commands the world's admiration, if there is today in Eretz Yisrael a community so strong and determined in its purpose that its resistance needs to be taken seriously by Great Britain, it is mainly because of what has been achieved by Zionism during Weizmann's leadership and, in great part, because of his leadership. He brought to the task of statesmanship a combination of idealism and realism, of passionate devotion and objective clarity, of long-range vision and attention to immediate short-range tasks. He avoided alike the mistakes of the doctrinaire and the opportunist. He knew how to distinguish between an opponent and an enemy and to win over antagonists to his point of view. He represented Jewry with dignity, manifesting in his utterances the self-discipline that avoids truculence and overcomes rancor. It is significant that the Congress could not find a successor for his office who could command the confidence of the entire movement. We can but hope that a new leader of his stature

will arise or that conditions will change so as to permit his recall to leadership.

* * *

Since the above was written, we have received further information bearing on the problem of Zionist participation in the forthcoming Conference. Today's New York *Times* (January 2, 1947) reports on the authority of a spokesman for the British government that it is considering a change of policy and now inclines to partition. But the British insist, however, that the suggestion come from the Zionists so as not to preclude the discussion of possible alternative plans offered by the Arab states. The *Times* likewise reports, in the name of a spokesman for the Jewish Agency, that the Zionists are willing to accept a partition plan which would give the Jews the area reserved for them in the report of the Peel Commission on partition in 1937, plus the Negev. If these reports are correct, they seem to us to constitute a sufficient change in British policy to warrant Zionist participation in the Conference.

WANTED—A PHILOSOPHY FOR JEWISH EDUCATION

FOR two days, December 23 and 24, the rabbis of the Conservative group sat in special convention assembled, and discussed the problem of education in their synagogue schools. This extraordinary session of the Rabbinical Assembly was the result of a decision made during the June 1946 annual convention, when rabbis from many parts of the country expressed their apprehensions concerning the efficacy of their educational work. They pointed out that the congregational school, as at present constituted, does not succeed in reaching large enough numbers of Jewish children, does not succeed in teaching those whom it does reach enough about Judaism, and certainly does not offer the kind of training which is calculated to produce future leaders in Israel. There was not enough time then to go into the question thoroughly. Hence the special session.

The meetings were serious; one might even say, somber. For the cold facts brought to the attention of the hundred or more rabbis were hard to face. Between two-thirds and three-quarters of the Jewish children of school age in the United States are today getting no education whatever, not even the attenuated Sunday school type. Of those who are exposed to Jewish education, about one-sixth attend Conservative congregational schools. And of those who attend such schools very few remain longer than two years. In spite of the small registrations, there is a dreadful shortage of teachers; and while standards seem to be rising in some of the schools in the large metropolitan centers, there seems to be no perceptible increase in the general will to educate. The rabbis appeared to be sincerely disturbed; but it would be essentially inaccurate to say that very much progress was made at the conference in dealing with this disturbing condition.

For the rabbis within the Rabbinical Assembly, known as Conservative, revealed themselves again to be without a philosophy distinct enough or compelling enough to weld them into a powerful action group. At most, they seem to share a general orientation, to be described, as one of the discussants put it, somewhat like Maimonides' God—purely by negatives. The philosophy is *not* Orthodox, *not* Reform, and *not* secularist. Whatever may be the merits of such a description of the Divine, it is utterly inadequate as a description of a satisfactory philosophy of Jewish education.

The lack of philosophy was evident in every phase of the discussion. For ex-

ample, the question of auspices came up. Which is the best type of school, the completely independent congregational school, the school associated with a Bureau of Jewish Education, the school affiliated with a local branch of the United Synagogue? The rabbis themselves represented almost every point of view. Some denounced the Bureaus; some lauded the Bureaus. Some resented supervision from any source other than the Conservative; others were content to call in the educators. Some felt that congregational schools ought to be subsidized by local welfare funds, inasmuch as they served the entire community; others felt that subsidies would cost the schools their ideological independence.

An almost equally wide divergence of views was expressed on the question of curriculum. Rabbi Samuel Katzoff, of Easton, Pa., reported on the attitudes of rabbis toward various subjects taught, their relative importance and the points of view from which they ought be approached. This study revealed most clearly perhaps how far the Conservative group is from having adopted a policy and sticking to it. Within the Assembly, there are men who are prepared to teach certain parts of the Bible as legend and folklore, while others reject such an approach completely. While all the rabbis are concerned about ritual practices, there is considerable difference of opinion with regard to the extent to which children should be led to consider the entire tradition binding. Even on the question of Hebrew, clarity is lacking. Some insist that the schools should strive to produce Hebrew speakers, others being content with Hebrew readers, while still others want to concentrate upon transmitting a maximum of content in English in the hope that the desire to learn Hebrew may grow out of an acquired love of Jewish knowledge.

The day school occupied the attention of the group at intervals throughout the conference. While there was practically no theoretical objection to the day school, the rabbis in the medium-sized and smaller communities saw in the day school little hope for the solution of their problem. At best, a very small minority of parents are prepared to send their children to such schools, and therefore large concentrations of Jews are required to provide the necessary minimum of pupils.

A study of the discussions at the conference leads to the following conclusions: (1) No group within Jewish life can hope to progress unless it cooperates fully with all other groups in reviving the will to educate. Isolationism is fatal. (2) Jewish education must become the prime concern of the community. No organization interested in Jewish life, whether of the philanthropic, Zionist, religious or cultural kind, can afford to dry up the sources of its future supply by ignoring the local problems of education. (3) New media, such as the movies, recordings, radio, and the arts must be utilized to the full in order to stimulate the interest which at present has flagged to a dangerous point. (4) The leisure periods of the year, particularly the summer months, and the long winter and spring vacations must be exploited for intensive learning, especially the learning that comes from actual living together in a Jewish atmosphere. (5) Adult Jewish education must be developed quickly and fully, in order to take advantage of the momentum of the past which still operates in so many of the young parents of today.

(6) More important, however, than any of these considerations is the need for a philosophy of Judaism that one can become passionate about, for which young people would be willing to make sacrifices, a philosophy which will do for

the Jewry of America what Zionism is doing for that of Palestine and for the Jewries for whom life is intolerable where they live. We need a cause worth fighting for—and then we shall have teachers, and followers. Such a philosophy hardly came up for discussion at the Rabbinical Assembly conference, and that was probably at the heart of so much of the discouragement which many of the men experienced. Such a philosophy must be all-embracing; it must be a philosophy of Judaism, and not merely a philosophy of a particular wing. When an over-all philosophy takes hold of Jews of all kinds and all interests, so that they are ready to work together for its future, then enough stimulus will be generated to provide adherents for all the diverse interpretations.

Why then should the next step not be a conference on Jewish education called by all who want to see a Jewish future? Let us all get together on this problem, and tackle it as one people!

THE PROBLEM OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

IN an effort to cope with the shocking increase in juvenile delinquency throughout the country, the National Conference for the Prevention and Control of Juvenile Delinquency was convened in Washington recently. At the invitation of the Attorney General of the United States, Tom C. Clark, over one thousand communal leaders and skilled professionals assembled to deliberate on the problems of delinquency. For three full days, these delegates of varying faiths, colors, politics, economic strata, and professional skills drew upon their knowledge and experience to present recommendations to the government. The full report of these recommendations will be published in the near future and will undoubtedly set valuable guideposts.

We comment on this Conference now because we have at hand the preliminary findings and see in them some noteworthy insights. There seems to be general agreement among the educators, social workers, psychiatrists, housing experts, religious and community leaders that underlying the normal and healthy development of the child are the three factors of the family, spiritual values, and a stable society. We respect the highly specialized skills of the professions which make these suggestions and we derive a sense of vindication in their advocacy of more satisfying family life, of spiritual standards of behavior, and of a society which undertakes responsibility for its citizens, in order to reduce personal maladjustment and anti-social behavior.

Our society has attained an amazing degree of complexity, eliminating the intimacy of living of an earlier age. Various forms of personal and social disorganization have been the result. Increase in the rates of divorce, crime, and suicide is the evidence. Jewish life has been subjected to the same pressures as the general environment and within the lifetime of one generation has displayed the most startling increase in such disorganization. We have too frequently patterned ourselves after the prevailing modes of the times to our own detriment and the detriment of society. It would be well for us to recognize that our traditional belief in a happy family life, a religious orientation, and a social outlook is not old-fashioned but is the key to the proper development of our children in modern times and modern terms. A Jewish education combined with a home life in accord with Jewish ethical teachings will produce not only the stable individual but the responsible member of society.

There is a final point that we derive

from this Conference. It seems that the extent of agency facilities and resources plays a substantial role in curbing delinquency. The government has considerable responsibility for maintaining such facilities but the pattern in America has been for private agencies to carry a substantial part of this obligation. The several Jewish agencies that function in the areas of education, recreation, child-care, and delinquency need maximum support and encouragement today. We must maintain the tools for prevention and repair of personal and social breakdown. We will be especially fortunate if general acceptance is gained for the three factors described, so that distortions are eliminated and need not be dealt with because of failure to live adequately.

REALITIES AND VALUES

As reported in the New York *Times* of December 31, 1946, the Right Reverend Henry St. George Tucker declared, in his final sermon as Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, that God has selected Christian Americans to extend the Christian conception of justice and to achieve one world morally and spiritually.

We need not say that we approve of justice and of "one world" as objectives of religious endeavor, but why cannot religious bodies choose the cause of God without assuming that God has chosen them as His only or most favored instrument?

We believe that atheist Russia, Confucianist China, India with its many religious sects, the Buddhists and Moslems of the world, not to mention us Jews and the Christians who are not Americans, have the same right and duty to contribute to the establishment of the one world of the future that "Christian Americans" have.

The insistance on the doctrine of chosenness, whether by Jews, Christians, or adherents of other religions, is an impediment not an aid to the ends the worthy bishop has in mind.

▼

An interesting article on "Ethics in Synagogue Life" appears in the December 1946 issue of *The Torch*, the organ of the National Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs affiliated with the United Synagogue of America. We can only cite below a few of the practices which its author, Rabbi David A. Goldstein, recommends.

Congregations should avoid competitive methods of enlarging their membership. They should not bid for new members on the basis of lower dues nor hold out social advantages, like a certain congregation that advertised "the opportunity to meet the right people and enjoy social prestige."

The pulpit should be free, but controversial questions of congregational policy should be discussed by the rabbi not from his pulpit but at meetings at which laymen can also express themselves.

Congregations should provide fair salaries and a secure tenure of position for rabbis and all other synagogue employees. Teachers' salaries should reflect the importance of their profession and should range between $3,000 and $4,000 a year instead of between $1,200 and $2,400 as at present.

No seats in the synagogue should ever be sold or specially reserved and there should be no solicitation of funds for congregational purposes at any of the solemn services.

Are these suggestions utopian? Not if one more suggestion of Rabbi Goldstein's is also adopted, that congregations in every community which have the same

religious ideology, should federate and pool their resources.

▼

IN THE COLUMN "WHAT Others Say," by "Mevaker," in the November 8th issue of the *South African Jewish Times,* the charge that Palestinian Jewry is irreligious is refuted. "In Tel Aviv alone," it is pointed out, "there are 200 places of worship which are open every day and draw large congregations. The Great Synagogue in Allenby St. . . . is crowded out every evening and has often to hold overflow services in the street. Talmudical colleges are found in every town and in several of the villages."

The percentage of Jews who observe Jewish religious practices in Eretz Yisrael, according to "Mevaker," is probably greater than in diaspora Jewry. That should not be surprising, since there whoever wants to observe Jewish traditional laws and rites can do so.

But that does not mean that all is well in the Yishuv with respect to religion. What formal religion there is in the land today has been brought from the diaspora and follows the customary diaspora pattern. Although in other areas of culture the Yishuv is creative of new values, it has shown no corresponding creativity in the field of religion.

We do not doubt that that too will come eventually. But until we see evidence of it, we cannot be complacent about religious conditions in our homeland.

▼

ANOTHER INTERESTING ITEM from the *South African Jewish Times.* In its "Open Forum" section in the issue of Nov. 22, there appears a letter to the editor concerning the dispute between India and South Africa in the UN Assembly. The writer considered the problem "an important test case in which UNO must use its right to intervene even against the sovereignty of its members."

He also observes that "India's dispute with South Africa involves the whole question of minority rights—a subject of vital concern to Jews."

We have always maintained the obligation of American Jewry to uphold the cause of the American Negro rather than be satisfied with enjoying the privileged status of American Whites. We are therefore happy to see South African Jews similarly trying to ally Jewry with the cause of the underprivileged Indian minority in their country.

▼

IN VIEW OF THE REVIVED INterest in religion which Judah Goldin points out in his article elsewhere in this issue, it is interesting to note a complaint voiced by Prof. J. Paul Williams in his presidential address to the National Association of Bible Instructors. Professor Williams, who is chairman of the department of history and literature of religion at Mt. Holyoke College, South Hadley, Mass., is reported by Religious News Service of December 24, 1946, as deploring the waning interest in Bible research and in research in religion generally.

We wonder what is the explanation of this waning interest? Is it correlated with the observable trend in our day toward romantic mysticism and authoritarianism in religion?

When we study the Bible by the same methods of critical research as any other ancient text, we do so on the assumption that it can only be understood in relation to the state of civilization at the time and in the place of its origin. This runs counter to the assumption that the Bible, as divine, is above time and space, that its message is eternal and unchangeable, its meaning everlastingly the same.

For those to whom the Bible speaks

(*Continued on Page* 24)

Living in a Religious Climate*

By JUDAH GOLDIN

WE are living in a religious climate. For the first time in a long time there is an unmistakable religious quality in much of our thinking, in much of what we say, in much for which we hope. Does this sound like an exaggeration? Well then, what is a religious climate? Is it not ultimately a lively awareness of our limitations despite all the sensational examples of our wit and skills, an assumption of responsibility toward ends greater than ourselves, an acute concern for the welfare of fellowmen, submission to a discipline which keeps the ends greater than ourselves and our kinship with fellowmen everywhere in perfect focus? *Higgid lekha adam mah tov*: It hath been told thee, O man, what is good and what the Lord doth require of thee—to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God. There is at present a great readiness to welcome such teaching.

A Religious Climate But Not a Religious Society

What is particularly impressive, especially if we contrast with our own day the first twenty-five or thirty-five years of this century, is the fact that this religious quality is no longer limited to the thought and speech of mystics only, of clergy only, of reformers only. In every circle and craft you can hear a religious note. Thus A. V. Hill, one of the world's leading physiologists: "What scientists today need," he says, "is the inspiration of a great ideal, a common interest, a common standard of ethical behavior, a common refusal to sacrifice or exploit a universal good for a temporary or sectional advantage. How we can achieve it," he continues, "only the future can show, but it is worth trying. It will not make headlines in the papers: immorality alas, not morality, is 'news'. Those who fancy themselves as hardboiled realists, as the 'practical men' who practice the errors of their forefathers, may deride us and our principles. But the truest form of realism is to recognize that human well-being, indeed the continued existence of human society, depends more on improvement of morality and reasonableness than on invention of machinery or organization."

Not once does the word religion occur in this passage by Professor Hill; but can there be any mistaking of the texture of his objective? Or is there any mistaking the message by one of America's most important contemporary poets who wrote, in his reactions to the recent war, himself a soldier, "It is not the commonplace of suffering or the platitudinous comparison with the peace, or the focus on the future that should occupy us; but the spiritual progress or retrogression of the man in war, the increase or decrease in his knowledge of beauty, government and religion." And Toynbee prays for the rebirth of the *Res publica Christiana.*

It used to be that such thoughts were published before the Christmas and Easter seasons and removed gently from sight in the remaining ten months of the year. Now, on the other hand, it is in some respects difficult to read the reflections of any sensitive person or to listen in on the conversations of people whose vocabulary is not confined to the cliché, without soon, very soon, discovering that God, morality, piety, saintliness, sin, charity, spirit have become major themes.

Why this is so, that is, how the transi-

* Originally presented as a lecture at the State University of Iowa.

tion from a general indifference to religious teaching, to a preoccupation with it came about, is itself an interesting question. Without undertaking to answer it, I would like to make one parenthetical comment. It is no more than a tempting error to suggest that the preoccupation with religion began after the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. To be sure, the terrifying implications of atomic warfare have given this preoccupation an urgency and momentum it might otherwise not have acquired in so short a time. But a new and more sympathetic approach towards religious traditions appeared even before the nuclear physicists revealed their secret.

Be that as it may, there is a question which deserves, I believe, more immediate attention than the explanation of the change to a positive attitude toward religion from a negative and neutral one; and it is the latter question which I would now like to attempt formulating and proceed to consider. The question is this: Why is it that despite the abundance of religious feeling and thinking we still seem to be far from a religious society; why is it that despite sermonic editorials and evangelistic novels and theological essays and perennial philosophies, business goes on as usual: on the international diplomatic scene, there is distrust, intrigue, the give and take of threats—nations are once again being taught to suspect each other's motives and gestures; on the various home fronts there are conflicts between groups of all sorts, regional conflicts, racial conflicts, denominational conflicts, economic conflicts, and again threats and suspicions? Why is it that despite the climate in which we now live there is so little to distinguish the present circumstances of our life from those which prevailed in non-religious times so called? Presumably, our preachers always told us that if we took religion seriously we would find ourselves in a better world. Presumably too, our contemporary thinkers and writers agree with the preachers and also say that we need religion if we are to survive: *"im lo ta-aminu, ki lo te-amenu"*—"if ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established." Except for some really trivial modifications, substantially all those who have helped create the present religious climate say just this, that materialistic man is obsolete and that the good life will come when we begin to cultivate the spirit. With so large a majority and so much in its favor, why is it that the religious climate has made so little change in our surroundings?

The Uncritical Retreat from Secularism

Well, there is more than one explanation for this fact; but the first, it seems to me, is this: The religious climate has had so little effect on our lives because many who were bitterly disappointed by secularism have been guilty of an uncritical retreat. This requires some comment.

For at least a century, indeed even longer than that, our traditional religious premises and teachings were summoned to critical investigation. Students of anthropology and comparative culture, textual scholars, devotees of the natural sciences, the propagandists for modernism —each with information from their respective fields of research—directed towards religious belief and literature a multitude of questions and challenges. Not always were the questions fair nor the challenges valid; often too these specialists succumbed to polemics which is altogether different from wisdom. Nevertheless, it would be silly to pretend that they did not furnish us with a number—a wealth, in fact—of valuable insights. Anthropologists did discover for us habits and convictions of sundry peoples and as a result our own practices and beliefs be-

came more readily understandable. Textual scholars and philologists could prove that some of our cherished notions were derived from unreliable readings: here a word had been misunderstood, there a word had to be emended, and not always were the consequences of only grammatical significance. Natural scientists did reveal phenomena about the universe which made certain long revered accounts no more than beautiful conjectures, hardly literal records of fact. The advocates of modernism did after all contribute to the popularization of certain liberties and opportunities without which the amenities, the dignity of life, are no longer thinkable, without which life would be barbarous.

To repeat (since some people are rather touchy on this score), not every challenge to our historic religions had substance. We have seen dozens of pet theories discredited. More than one anthropologists was let into a jungle by the primitives. Numerous archaeological remains have now taught us that some pontifical conclusions by biblical higher critics were no more elevated than private petulances. Regardless of how natural science is described today, it is certainly far from mechanistic, and no major scientific figure would at present care to speak like some of his confident predecessors of the past century. Much in recent years has made —and should make—modernists blush. All this, perhaps more, is true. But all this cannot cancel the fact that we owe to these men knowledge which our ancestors simply did not have. And from an increase in knowledge there did come some measure of increased understanding —of the nature of man, of the dilemmas of intellect, of the character of the universe. To dismiss all this in one mock-heroic gesture as though it were of no worth at all; to declare defiantly, "The legacy of the past hundred years has brought us to disaster, now let us completely disown it and unconditionally surrender to a universe of medieval discourse"; to conclude that because yesterday's patterns of thinking proved inadequate therefore the patterns of the day before yesterday must have been the only adequate ones; to pretend, in other words, that only two alternatives are at our disposal, that there are no choices other than modernism with its purposelessness or medievalism with its categorical assertions, is as mischievous as it is unwarranted.

"Deep in the shadowy bethel of the tired mind," writes a highly talented convert in a recent and superb poem,

". . . The man surrenders reason to the ghost. . . .
All arguments are vain—that Notre Dame
Has plumbing, Baptists shoot their fellowmen,
Hindus are pious, nuns have Cadillacs . . ."

"All arguments are vain," forsooth. As a report of the contemporary retreat the poem is uncannily precise. But only the wildest distortion of religious tradition could recommend this as a program for religion. Not one of the civilized monotheisms came into being or made its bid by proclaiming that the evils of this world are a matter of indifference, purely marginal accidents. It is, to put it mildly, somewhat difficult to imagine Amos delivering such a speech—

All arguments are vain—that the Temple
Has plumbing, Israelites shoot their fellowmen,
Philistines are pious, Levites have Cadillacs.

"O victory of the Unintelligence" indeed, to use our poet's own words. How much finer and more honest was the an-

cient prayer, "Graciously Thou favorest man with knowledge and teachest him understanding. O by Thy grace, favor us with knowledge, understanding, and discernment." For is piety piety only when it is removed from intelligence? A piety that takes flight at study is a fugitive piety and casts only a shadow upon life. And our surroundings today remain what they have been though we are in a religious climate because to many unreason has become the only release from an age of limited reasonableness, and they refuse to consider the possibilities of larger reason accompanied by a sense of moral responsibility.

The Neglect of the Need for Religious Disciplines

In the second place, the contemporary religious climate has thus far failed to achieve significant results because so much of the writing and lecturing about man's need for faith or man's need for purpose or man's need for sanctions beyond himself—the variety of formulation is immaterial at the moment—seldom advances beyond rhetoric and is not supplemented by distinct, tangible disciplines of some kind. What we are left with in the end therefore is some exercise in theory without a curriculum for practice.

This is under no circumstances to suggest that our latest protagonists for the religious life are insincere (obviously of the insincere there is nothing to expect). They are very sincere, entirely honest. They are wholeheartedly convinced that unless modern man recognizes an authority higher than expediency, unless he is prepared for an "invincible surmise," he will perish. But they stop short of concrete regimens for conduct, for everyday conduct, which in the last analysis is the most practical memorandum of the great truths and the best training for religious behavior. They seem to have forgotten that a theology without an accompanying ceremonial is at best no more than an academic adventure. It's as though a chemist were eternally praising isotopes but never conducting experiments, as though an artist pleaded for beauty without recommending beautiful objects, as though a legislator never went further than the preamble to his Constitution.

Now, in part, this omission of specific disciplines to accompany the religious revival is the result of modesty. Many who have only recently arrived at a position beyond humanism feel that it would be out of place for them to draw up a course for conduct to which they are themselves newcomers. Certainly such humility is a virtue rather than a shortcoming. In part too, discipline has been neglected because first an examination of basic principles was necessary, and in all fairness there has hardly been enough time to draw up also a detailed plan of action. After all, the precepts, commandments, and rituals of our historic religions are themselves the product of centuries, not overnight creations. So far therefore there is little justification for criticism.

But the fact remains that in large part there has been a reluctance to speak plainly about the incompleteness of religious doctrine or thought without specific ritual obligations. And that reluctance is due chiefly to what might be called an antinomian hangover. Because it often happens that men go through their prescribed duties mechanically, because it also happens that men may be meticulous in ceremonial observance and outrageous ethically and spiritually, because it is generally admitted that cult is but a vehicle for spirit, that it is but a means to an end—because of all this there is a disinclination to treat of ritual requirements either seriously or at all. Why should set routines be necessary, the complaint runs. If we are already conscious of the essen-

tial truth, what more can the rites accomplish?

These protests are as ancient as our calendar. Philo heard them in his day. "There are some," he writes, "who, regarding laws in their literal sense in the light of symbols of matters belonging to the intellect, are overpunctilious about the latter, while treating the former with easy-going neglect." And we may well continue with his reaction. "Such men," he goes on to say, "I, for my part, should blame for handling the matter in too easy and off-hand a manner: they ought to have given careful attention to both aims, to a more full and exact investigation of what is not seen and in what is seen to be stewards without reproach. As it is, as though they were living alone by themselves in a wilderness, or as though they had become disembodied souls, and knew neither city nor village nor household nor any company of human beings at all, overlooking all that the mass of men regard, they explore reality in its naked absoluteness. These men are taught by the sacred word to have thought for good repute, and to let go nothing that is part of the customs fixed by divinely empowered men greater than those of our time."

We need not deny that it is possible for discipline to overreach itself; nor may we stand idly by when we discover that punctiliousness is overshadowing devotion to the ideal. But it is futile to expect large abstract formulations to work upon men and women without the assistance of activities which are frequent, which excite the imagination, which are manifest, which create the possibilities for equality of participation by humble folk and intellectuals. Otherwise we shall produce metaphysical snobs. Otherwise, be the climate ever so religious, it is doomed to still life.

The Mediocrity of Our Religious Institutions

In the third place, regardless of how receptive our mood may be at present to religious instruction, little, I think, will come of it so long as our religious institutions continue to produce or represent only middling specimens of their pretensions. Of course mediocrity afflicts not only religious bodies. Only rarely, for example, can universities today boast of excellence (despite a widespread mythology to the contrary) in various fields. It is not an endorsement of capitalism to admit that our trade unions are remote from what was originally hoped for and from them. But it is poor comfort to be told that our religious institutions are no worse than others. The pathos of it all is that they are no better. One need do no more than reread part V of the Lynds' *Middletown* (the work first appeared in 1929 and the field work was done by 1925!) and then consult his own present experiences, to be painfully discomfited. So little has changed in the past twenty years.

This is not to say that there are no good folk or pious souls in today's churches and synagogues. It is to say, however, that our churches and synagogues are not noteworthy for impressive saintliness or extraordinary idealism or religious thought of distinction. As Professor Louis Ginzberg once remarked about the Reform movement (I am not giving his words exactly, but I believe I am reproducing faithfully the substance of his comments), "It talked a good deal of spirituality in the Jewish religion; well, what notable saint or saintly type did it produce?" *Eni ela ke-mosif al divre rabbi*—his remark can be applied without injustice almost everywhere.

"I haven't heard a new idea at our services or received a fresh insight into our traditions for at least a decade," said a friend of mine not long ago; "for that

atter, I haven't been startled into ad-iration by the politics of the officers of y congregation." His outburst alas re-lled similar exclamations (again com-are *Middletown*). By and large the idely publicized conversion of several ell known men and women has been voked by religious regulars only as a nfirmation and support of their habitual rmulae and practices. Naturally it is acing suddenly to discover that some-dy who yesterday was one of our prin-pal antagonists is today in our ranks, llaborating with us. But it is terribly ortsighted and risky to leave the matter that. I do not mean that the new de-nders of the faith cannot be depended on; they will probably make vigorous ampions. But triumphs ought to serve more than occasions for self-congratu-tion. They might with greater profit rve as opportunities for fresh analysis. hat was there about our way of think-g and acting which originally alienated em, we ought to ask our new allies. re there certain elements which we fail emphasize sufficiently—is that why be-re their recent change of heart, they uld have naught of us?

This, it seems to me, every religious nomination ought now to be doing stead of mimeographing statistics on the mber of men in the armed forces it rved or distributing pamphlets on the unger" for religious education in the blic school system or issuing releases on prominent converts. Is there perhaps fear to look inward? Yet every histori-l religious group, if its creed provides genuine answer to the questions the flective mind always asks, if it is moved charity, if it is hopeful for wider fel-wship and increasing understanding, as nothing to fear except mediocrity. ot excellence is a threat to our institu-ons, but the lowest common denominat-of performance.

The Lack of Privacy for Spiritual Self-Culture

In the fourth place, in large measure the religious climate has proven ineffectual because we have not yet located the whereabouts of the individual, we have not yet discovered his proper inviolability nor understood his singular requirements and significance. Again, this problem is not limited to religion. Everywhere the individual seems to have vanished in the collective institutions — which, however, make our social framework stable and (often) survival possible. You cannot seriously undertake education without schools, government without political organization; you obviously cannot put up a private chapel for every worshiper. But on the other hand, men have been worn out by this constant pressure on their uniqueness. Indeed, the revolt against secularism was largely inspired by the contemporary's disgust with all the machinery which has reduced him to a statistical digit. And many turned to religion because they had been reassured that here the individual would be able to call his soul his own.

This is what they were told; this is amongst other things what religion (at least from Jeremiah's days on) does promise man. The trouble is that in the mechanics of daily experience we have still not succeded in protecting the individual's solitariness, even with the best intentions in the world. And because he has not yet found himself, modern man has not been able to change himself; and without changed individuals how shall we accomplish a changed society?

I have before me the weekly bulletin of the congregation to which I belong. On the Sabbath I participate in public worship; which is as it should be. There is a public lecture by a visiting speaker, one night during the week and we are urged to attend. There happen to be two

committees of which I am a member, and I note that each committee has scheduled to meet on different evenings during the week. I hasten to add that the committees are not unimportant, and I believe that if the committees did not meet the congregation would suffer. There is a Bible class one night in the week where I shall sit with my fellow members and participate in a discussion. By coincidence, one night this week the monthly meeting of the men's club is to be held. I also received a letter pleading that I take charge of a class in the children's Sunday School, and I am debating with myself whether I have the right to refuse. During the day I work. (One word more. Except for the time when an organized activity is going on, the doors of my synagogue are locked).

Now, I grant that each of these activities is important. I confess, if I were asked which of these ought to be eliminated, I would not know what to suggest. But that there is a problem here can hardly be gainsaid. And the fact that religion is not alone in suffering from this congestion of communal duties and expression is neither a solution of the problem nor necessarily an excuse for it.

Who is to blame? I am confident it is not the ministers, for upon them the consequences of so much group life fall the heaviest. Who then is to blame? I am to blame; we all are to blame; first, for having reasoned that since man is a social animal, therefore he is no more than a social animal; second, for lacking a will sufficiently resolute somewhere to call a halt to every trespassing upon our privacy. "We are too unseparate," wrote Robert Frost in one of his poems. And because of this we fail to develop inner resources and come more and more to depend upon stimuli from outside ourselves—which may be "dandy" for gregariousness but fatal to originality or peace of mind.

To repeat, the same problem exists in education, government, social service. But it is in religion that the problem assumes an especially insistent sharpness. For it is not necessary that every man be a scholar; it is possible for the citizen to delegate authority in some areas to someone beside himself; men have made their adjustments to a wide variety of economic and social systems. But if a man lose his soul what shall avail him?

Conclusions

To summarize: The impact of the religious climate on our society has thus far been negligible because, first, so many of the men who helped bring that climate into being were guilty of an uncritical retreat from reason; regardless of what comfort that gave them personally, such a step could be of little assistance to others. Second, although the need for faith in a judge higher than our own judgments has been argued with eloquence, recommendations for specific disciplines to prevent this faith from evaporating, have been embarrassingly tongue-tied. Third, we still suffer from institutional mediocrity and are inclined to interpret the present religious revival mainly as a justification of our customary programs and ways of doing things. Fourth, in the elaborate network of our activities and organizations we have lost trace of the individual, and our society remains unchanged because he remains what he was.

No doubt there are other reasons too, but these, it seems to me, are the principal ones.

Now it is possible to conclude on the basis of the present analysis that since the contemporary religious climate has made so little difference in the context of our life, it is therefore an altogether

rthless thing, at best one more symp-
n of modern man's neurosis or confu-
n. It *is* possible to reach such a con-
sion, just as it is possible to say that
ularism or rational humanism is entire-
bankrupt. But neither of these state-
nts is true. Each exaggerates the signi-
ance of the religious climate. Those
o see only the little change around us
ply that if religion were a genuine need
human life the religious climate would
itself have produced a better world.
ose who see only the failure of human
dom and enterprise imply that the re-
ious climate is itself a great achieve-
nt—which is simply not the case. And
ause each of these statements is an
ggeration, we get nowhere.

For the truth is that a religious climate
not enough, even as a scientific tem-
, let us say, is not enough to create a
ntific world, and an artistic tempera-
nt is not enough to create art. But
t simply means that a prerequisite for
nething is not to be confused with that something. You cannot have science without a scientific interest, you cannot have art without a sensitivity to the beautiful; and by the same token you cannot have a religious society without a receptiveness to religious thought and feeling. Yet when you have that receptiveness you have reached only the first step in the whole journey.

Living in a religious climate is an experience or opportunity of considerable value, but it is not enough. What is required now is that we take advantage of this climate—to deepen an understanding of religion, to develop works which can make that understanding vivid, to try to rise above average exemplification of ideals, and to do all this not only collectively but as individuals. If we depend on the climate to do all this for us, I think we shall be like the farmer who expected nature to do all his chores; if, on the other hand, with the climate in our favor we set to work wisely, the harvest is almost sure to be rich.

o I'm Now a Jew in Transit!

By AHBE JAY TREU

The following story was suggested by an item in "Random Thoughts," which appeared in the November 29th issue of our magazine. It described the "Jews in transit . . . who migrate from the Adirondacks to Miami and from Miami to the Adirondacks"—and who "drown all their communal cares in card games which go on forever, under skies both inclement and fair."

Editors

HEY, you, *yeshiva bucher* . . . come sit down, play little gin rummy with me . . . relax while? Or am I wrong, you don't play . . . you have your own ways of re-ing? . . . What do you do to get away m your life? Or don't you have to away from it? I know the things you and the life you lead—it's good . . a life of love and service . . . well, ne is too . . I make women happy . . . e months a year I dress them well—make a good living, too. . . . So for three months I go away — down to Miami Beach. . . . It's lovely down there. It's warm and good and relaxing . . . so I lose a couple of dollars at the Club . . . or at the track. . . . You don't know that I waited all my life to do that, to throw away a few bucks and have it not mean a thing. . . . I remember too well when every nickel counted. . . . Now I don't even count my change and I'm free—or should I say my life is full . . . .

All my life I wanted to travel to get around. . . . Instead of breaking my head over math or foreign languages . . . (and winding up a floor boy anyway after four years) I went to . . work . . . learned a lot, learned so much I saved a few bucks . . . went in for myself. . . . I don't have to go into that . . . you know that kind of a story too well, I'm sure. . . . For fifteen years, *yeshiva bucher,* I worked, without a vacation. . . . My workers had it better than I did . . . believe me. . I still work later than they do. . . . So I make a buck or two on them . . . listen, I'd rather make a dollar for myself than a hundred working for somebody else. . . . Maybe that's the whole thing with us Jews in transit?—We don't want nothing from no one. . . . That makes sense to me. . . .

It isn't fun to measure women all day and be nice to people who don't mean a damn thing to you except bread and butter and even more than the bread, and more than the butter . . . like the new car I just got . . . smeared a couple of dollars for that. . . . Nothing to be proud of . . . but that's the world we're living in . . . and that's the language they understand. . . . I give . . . give plenty, not for tax deductions either . . . my accountant takes care of that. . . . All the appeals—they hit me every single day, every single year . . . and I give. . . .

Think about my people? . . sure I do. . . . I think of my union leader, a Jew who hates my guts and calls me "paternal employer," I think of my workers who smile in front of me and curse me when I turn my back . . . and don't understand why I don't share my profits with them. . . . There aren't enough! I make a lot and yet it's a *little.* I go bust in one hour in my line! So I live while I can. . . . And remember this — when men come around to collect money for scholarships for seminary students—they get plenty—from my *pushke*—where I keep my winnings from gin rummy!

Random Thoughts

AFFIRMATIVE Jews may be divided into three groups: segregationists, aggregationists and congregationists.

The segregationists stress isolation, some in religion and others in culture.

The aggregationists urge cooperation both in religion and in culture.

The congregationists are old line Reformers and new line Conservatives who are repeating the Protestant mistake of expecting family clubs to keep a religious civilization alive.

* * *

If life is as a tale that is told, let it at least be well told.

Civilization arose as soon as the human being began to sense conflict between his own claims as an individual and those of society.

* * *

Some people suffer from intellectual frostbite, others from emotional sunstroke.

* * *

In richly appointed homes, where oil burners are so regulated that they automatically furnish the right amount of heat, one sees on cold days log fires blazing brightly in the hearths, as in olden days, before coal came into general use.

The two kinds of heat manage so to

ingle as to render the atmosphere all e more comfortable and cozy.

Might not the homes of American Jews kewise be rendered all the more enchant- g through the combined spiritual radia- on of Israel's historical culture and merica's highly modern civilization?

* * *

However much we may admire the re- gious philosophy of Hinduism, we can- ot refrain from asking: What has it one to help the population of Asia con- uer the poverty, dirt and disease under hich they have been living for thousands years?

Mother India kills off one baby out of very two, thanks to her parasitic feudal- m, which, with all her genius for re- gion, she has done nothing to mitigate.

Along comes Russia, introduces a new nd tenure, takes away from Buddhist onks and other hereditary masters val- able pasture lands and distributes them mong the people, opens up schools for ll the children, makes provision for eir higher education, establishes health rvice, brings in the machine age, pro- des jobs for all.

Russia does the right things for what e usually wrong reasons.

India does the wrong things for what e sometimes right reasons.

When will human beings learn to do e right things for the right reasons?

* * *

It makes one sad to see how the west inds have almost succeeded in effacing e hieroglyphics on the west side of the belisk in Central Park. It looks like a mbolic forecast of what the spirit of the est is destined to do to the civilization the East.

* * *

Our own nature dictates our philosophy human nature.

* * *

The ideals which determine our ideas about life are the resultant of our tradition, our surroundings and our desires.

* * *

When thought puzzles get to be as popular as word puzzles, we shall begin to solve our social riddles.

* * *

Rustem Vambery, a noted authority on law, contended that the International Military Tribunal which tried and condemned the Nazi leaders had resorted to an arbitrary form of jurisprudence.

He maintained that it lacked a definition of "aggressive war," and that even if such a definition existed, there was "no legal basis for considering aggressive war an international crime."

This throws light on a Rabbinic interpretation of the verse: "And the Lord God commanded Adam saying: 'Of every tree of the Garden thou mayest eat, but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat.'"

In that verse, say the Rabbis, God revealed to man the six or seven basic laws for the observance of which all human beings are held responsible. They then proceed to derive each of those laws from the text by means of their technique for interpretation.

What could have led them to engage in such far-fetched explanations of the Torah text?

The answer is: The Rustem Vamberys of their day must have charged God with having violated the proper juridical procedure when he sent a flood to destroy the wicked, since there is no mention of any definition of the "violence" for which God punished them, or of any legal precedent which God followed.

To satisfy these objectors the Rabbis found it necessary to prove that the laws defining violence had been given to Adam.

* * *

The right wing Conservatives have

taken over from us Reconstructionists the conception of Judaism as an evolving religious civilization.

The difference between them and us turns upon the definition of evolving.

They limit it to inevitable and automatic development. That is the significance of their favorite term "Catholic Israel."

In the term "evolving," we not only include but stress, as urgent and imperative for our day, deliberately planned reconstruction.

* * *

If longevity were evidence of intrinsic worth, elephants should be of greater worth than humans.

If the age of a religious practice were a measure of its sanctity, the prayers that a Brahmin recites three times a day would be the most sacred of all prayers, since they consist of the same Vedic verses that were used as prayers three thousand years ago.

* * *

Not to be accepted is painful; to be taken for granted is deadening.

* * *

An important factor in the lack of instructors in our schools and colleges, we were told recently, is that teachers or professors "are not accorded a high enough place in the community."

The truth is that though many a professional may not be accorded the place he deserves, a profession, as such, is generally accorded the place which those who pursue it have earned for it.

Medical practitioners, in ancient times, were slaves. Until not so long ago surgeons were part-time barbers. They have come up in the world, because they made it a principle to keep abreast of theoretical reconstructions and advances pertaining to their profession.

If teachers and rabbis would likewise learn to keep abreast of the theoretical reconstructions and advances in the psychological, social and religious sciences as these affect their respective callings, they would be granted recognition without their having to ask for it.

* * *

According to Lin Yutang the Chinese are Confucianists when all goes well and Buddhists when they are in trouble. Our Western intellectuals are atheists when all goes well and confusionists when they are in trouble.

* * *

A repentant German writes: "Is it possible to love a Fatherland which tolerates such bloody crimes? This war has taught us one thing at least: We must turn away with loathing from those who do not see God in man." (Paul Herzog in Partisan Review.)

A renegade Jew was overheard saying: A Jewish Palestine will render our position here insecure. The million European Jews who are homeless will have to die sometime, so why worry about them?

* * *

Now that Mexico is to have a sculptural group to represent the four freedoms, we are likely to have them taken as seriously as Liberty, whose statue stands at the gate of the New World, offering hospitality to the persecuted.

All you need to do with a great truth or principle to be exempt from living it is to make an idol of it.

* * *

Human life cannot be like a single thread. It is either, as in most instances, like a tangled skein, or as in rare cases, like a well-designed tapestry.

* * *

In view of the loose talk that we hear nowadays about the indebtedness of democracy to Christian tradition, it might be well to become acquainted with the actual facts of Anglo-American history.

"These historical facts make it very

clear," says F. S. C. Northrop in his recent book, *The Meeting of East and West,* "that the Protestant Reformation and its religion, by themselves do not necessarily produce democracy and its conception of religious toleration as a positive good."

* * *

When that which is suits us, we assume that it ought to be.

When that which ought to be displeases us, we consider it a mirage.

* * *

It took a high Church dignitary like the late Archbishop of Canterbury to find it safe to write "Christianity and Social Order," in which he gave a sympathetic study and defense of communism.

Such is the high cost of intellectual honesty.

* * *

We cannot afford to wait with our health until we know the final truth about our bodies and minds.

Neither can we afford to wait with our ethical spiritual decencies until we know the ultimate truth about the world and God.

* * *

Only the well-to-do can afford the exquisitely simple dress. Only those who abound in goodness can afford the exquisitely simple life.

Book Notes

REMBRANDT WITH A "JEWISH ANGLE"

REMBRANDT, THE JEWS AND THE BIBLE, by Franz Landsberger, translated by Felix N. Gerson. The Jewish Publication Society, Phila., Pa., 1946, xviii, 189 pp.

THE life and work of Rembrandt has been explored and exploited in scores of books and articles in many tongues. Even the movies tried a superficial portrayal of this amazing man, himself a superb portraitist, whose work will long outlive these mediocre attempts to picture this giant personality. Since Rembrandt's death in 1669 many worthy attempts have been made to analyze and understand his many-sided genius but never before has any author thought of giving us a Rembrandt with a "Jewish angle."

The author, explaining his motive in writing this book, says on the jacket: "Here was a man of Germanic ancestry who did not regard the Jews of Holland of his day as a 'misfortune,' but approached them with a friendly sentiment, dwelt in their midst and portrayed their personalities and ways of life. Rembrandt regarded the Bible as the greatest book in the world. . . . He never wearied in his devotion to Biblical themes. . . I have frequently referred to these remarkable facts in lectures . . and have felt it incumbent upon me to convey to others the solace I experienced in their contemplation. I desire, also, to furnish my co-religionists with an understanding of what Rembrandt has done for them, and bring them a recognition of their debt to his art. . . ."

On page six the author conveys to his co-religionists his contemplative experience before the work of this master in the following estimate: "He was ambitious and aspired to wider horizons. He wanted to create works of art that *should not be small and meticulous* and have

their merits determined *through the medium of a magnifying glass.* His desire was to produce works of a stately and imposing character, so that to see them in proper perspective one would have to step back several paces from the canvasses. He wished to attain such heights as a painter that he might be *surrounded by wealth and splendor.*" (My italics)

It is difficult indeed to repay a debt to an artist long dead. But it is doubly difficult, even impossible, to do so, if our feelings are influenced by an author who impugns the artist's motives by writing that he painted his masterpieces to attain "wealth and splendor." This estimate of Rembrant is certainly a strange form of repayment of a debt. In contradistinction, let me quote an author who makes no hypocritical gesture of repaying a debt to a dead artist. Here is in part Lionello Venturi's estimate of Rembrandt: "This reduction of religion to the individual's moral feeling has been expressed by no one else as well as by Rembrandt. His sacrifice of worldly beauty must have been influenced by the Mennonites' renunciation of worldly life. His (Rembrandt's) renunciation of material appearances in order to reach the depth of the soul seems pervaded by the spirituality of the Mennonites . . . but this affinity of their conception of moral and religious life exists in his paintings. And this reveals the background of Rembrandt's imagination."

Debts cannot be paid to dead artists by writing superficial and often false estimates of their careers. Recently Landsberger published a book called "A History of Jewish Art" in which the major portion is given up to a glossary of ceremonial objects for synagogue and home services and a chronological listing of synagogue architecture and synagogue decoration. This so-called history, however, gives little attention to the Jewish painters, sculptors and graphic artists of the last hundred years. It is easy for this author to speak of debts to dead artists, but in his history of Jewish art he has gone out of his way to write at great length of certain obscure German painters whose grandfathers were Jews but is entirely ignorant of many living and still functioning Jewish artists. An author who writes art books one after another seems to me to have little time to contemplate and evaluate art. His words must consequently be taken with considerable reservation.

During his lifetime, Rembrandt made over five hundred illustrations to the Old as well as the New Testament and more than two hundred paintings and etchings. That the Bible was a great influence in his life is as obvious as that the Bible was a great influence in Western civilization. It is doubtful that Rembrandt interpreted his Bible as the Jews of his day did, and it is still a question whether any Jews of his day inspired or influenced his art. In linking the name of Rembrandt with the word Jews, the author implies that Rembrandt was somehow influenced. The one man who might have had some effect on Rembrandt's thoughts and who lived during part of his lifetime was Spinoza. There is no record, however, of the two men having met.

Much of the historical material in the book, (dug up out of a long bibliography, together with six pages of small type footnotes, listed in back of the book, some of it from obscure and obsolete sources) has nothing to do with the chief character of the book. The book is divided into four chapters and, although every one of the titles links the name Rembrandt with the Jews, the link is merely rhetorical. This becomes evident in the very first chapter, "Rembrandt and the Jews Come to Amsterdam." Rembrandt and the Jews came there as a result of different causes, for different purposes, at differ-

ent times, and of course by different paths. History twisted to serve an author's purposes is fiction and reminds one of the oft repeated story in which the Jewish author produces a book called "The Elephant and the Jewish Question."

In the chapter "Rembrandt's Portraits of Jews," the author takes up some forty-odd pages of text, reproducing nineteen illustrations, only to admit that "with the exception of the portraits of Ephraim Bonus (known to me heretofore as Ephraim Bueno) and Menasseh Ben Israel, we are unable to identify with absolute certainty any Jewish portrait of Rembrandt's." Rembrandt painted and etched Jews and Jewish types as he did hundreds of other subjects. A few portraits may have been commissioned by Jews rich enough to sit for him. More likely he painted the Jewish type because he found in the Jewish face a spiritual content that served him in his lifelong quest into human emotions. Again I quote Lionello Venturi: "Rembrandt was the greatest luministic realist in his or our day. By his magic and creative powers he lit up the human soul." Living as he did on Anthonie Breestraat, sometimes called the Jodenbreestraat, which incidentally happened to be a section of Amsterdam where a large part of the Jewish population also resided, Rembrandt looked at the Jews around him as so much colorful material against a drab and smug Dutch majority.

To art lovers interested in the esthetic qualities of a Rembrandt, the subject matter of his pictures is merely the vehicle that conveys the spirit of this master. No real art lover cares whether a portrait is that of a Gouvernor, of a rich Burgher or of a Jew. He is not interested in their titles, wealth or particular religious sect. What is valued, remembered, honored and loved in a work of art is the spirit that went into its creation. In stressing the "Jewish angle" the author is blind to this spirit that motivated the artist's life.

Another example wherein this author stretches the Jewish link to the vanishing point is in the chapter, "Rembrandt's Scenes from Jewish Life." There are eight reproductions, only three of which are by the hand of Rembrandt. Two of the three are of the same subject, a drawing and an etching of "The Jewish Bride." The other five reproductions, needless to say, are by other artists. Here the author gives us many dry data of Jewish rites, customs, social, political and economic matters that are strangely out of place in a book on Rembrandt.

In his last chapter, "Rembrandt and the Bible," the author describes and sometimes dates the pictures that Rembrandt illustrates very much like a Baedecker in a monotonous and humorless style, retelling each Biblical story as illustrated in the book. This has been better done and with far greater felicity in reproductions by the German author E. W. Bredt, "Rembrandt-Bibel," Munich 1921.

One could easily overlook the author's pedestrian style and attribute it to the English translator. As a Jew one can smile at this futile attempt at forging a paper link between the Jews and Rembrandt. But as an artist and a lifelong devotee of Rembrandt's, this reviewer must condemn this book if only for its poor reproductions. This book is another proof of the wisdom in the ancient Chinese saying that "One picture is worth ten thousand words." An art book purporting to inspire a reader by the work of a master which contains such poor reproductions adds nothing to our appreciation. When I think of the labor and the pains that Rembrandt underwent, bending over his work at night, by candlelight, straining his eyes and his nerves, to produce those extraordinary nuances of line and form, those amazing shadows and lights, pour-

ing into his work a profound spirit, these reproductions are indeed poor tribute to his genius. Nor does it speak well for the author, a former professor of the History of Art at the University of Breslau and one time curator of the Jewish Museum in Berlin, whose stated objective is "to bring to them (the Jews) a recognition of their debt to his (Rembrandt's) art."

If Jews owe a debt to Rembrandt it is not greater than what is owed by the Gentiles at whose hands he suffered. If there is a debt to be paid, it is not because we are Jews, but because we are civilized humans who revere all great creative contributions towards a better life.

LIONEL REISS

REALITIES AND VAULES

(*Continued from Page* 9)

with the voice of a divine oracle Biblical research is, at best, a waste of time and energy.

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ACCORDING TO *Religious News Service* of December 20, 1946, Americans in 1945 contributed $1,000,000,000 to religion, the largest amount ever contributed in any one year. At the same time, it calls attention to the fact that this sum is but one-third of what Americans spent on tobacco and one-eighth of their expenditures for alcoholic beverages.

We cannot help asking why the outlay for religion should be compared with that for tobacco and liquor rather than that for, let us say, cosmetics, jewelry, sporting goods and other such luxuries. Does it imply an acceptance of the notion that religion is an "opiate" indulged in as an escape from reality?

It is sad but true that too much of religion does aim to afford flight from the harsh realities of the world as it is and too little of religion endeavors to *real*-ize the better world that we hope is yet to be.

CORRESPONDENCE

Affirms the Effectiveness of the Traditional Liturgy

Sirs:

"Random Thoughts" in a recent issue quotes the *ashamnu* of a rabbi "with a soul as white as snow." He finds that his people whom he has nourished with the "stone" of our Liturgy for twenty-seven fruitless years complain about the services. He feels like "sweeping away the whole mess (i.e., the traditional prayers of the *Mahzor*) with one annihilating gesture."

I too have been conducting services for well nigh twenty-seven years. I confess that I do not entertain a devastating impulse to abolish the whole *Mahzor*. I find that when worship is conducted with dignity and when the rabbi has a contagious enthusiasm for the nobility and sublimity of our traditional prayers, the people derive genuine spiritual satisfaction from that which my unknown colleague likens unto a stone.

As an incurable modernist, I admit that a few (indeed very few) of the *piyutim* are out of tune "with our needs, our wants, our hungers." Perhaps the disconsolate colleague meant to say just this much. If so, he should learn to be guilty of understatement rather than to transgress with a colossal and outrageous overstatement.

I shall not presume to defend a prayerbook which has a two thousand year old supplication that all nations form "one band to perform the will of God with a perfect heart"; which invokes God "to rule over the whole world in His glory" and which in its long list of *al het* prayers puts the accent on personal and collective ethical behavior, neglecting the rite in favor of the right. A Christian scholar, G. E. Biddle, in speaking of the *Mahzor*, says as follows: "When we come to view the half dozen or so great liturgies of the world purely as religious documents and to weigh their value as devotional classics, the incomparable superiority of the Jewish worship convincingly appears. Certainly the Jew has cause to thank God and the fathers before him for the noblest Liturgy the annals of faith can show."

The unfortunate congregants of the rabbi who has been nourishing them with a stone and their unhappy rabbi might react differently if they took to heart the following story:

Two young lads on a fleeting visit through the Louvre gazed at the masterpieces displayed in its galleries. One said to the other: "Let's go, there is nothing worth seeing here." An attendant who overheard him was outraged by this remark. He said to the bored guest: "Young man, these paintings are no longer on trial; — only the spectators are on trial."

RABBI MAX ARZT